

DPH Announces The Start of Flu Season: Vaccine Is Best Line of Defense For Delawareans 6 months and older

DOVER, Del. (Oct. 4, 2021) – October marks the start of the 2021-2022 influenza season, and given the State's ongoing fight against COVID-19, the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) believes it is more important than ever for Delawareans to protect themselves and loved ones by getting the flu vaccine as soon as possible. The flu vaccine is vital in helping avoid significant illness from the flu including hospitalization and death.

Children younger than 5, older adults, pregnant women, and those who have chronic underlying medical conditions are most at risk for complications from the flu and are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated now. DPH also urges vaccination for those who live or work with infants under 6 months of age, as well as those who live or work in congregant settings such as long-term care and correctional facilities.

"Because the number of cases dropped last year, many people think the flu has disappeared, but in fact, the flu is still a major health threat as it is highly contagious and can be deadly," said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. "At a time when hospitals are under tremendous strain from the coronavirus pandemic, we need to do all we can to keep even more people from overwhelming emergency departments and hospitals with flu illness. Getting the flu vaccine is the one key step to keep that from happening."

“With pandemic safety practices easing,” Rattay continued, “more Delawareans are interacting outside the home, more public events are happening, and fewer people are wearing masks. These things make it easier for the flu to spread. The flu vaccine is the strongest defense when it comes to keeping yourself and family members safe and preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and possibly death.”

Since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against influenza virus infection to develop in the body, it is important to get vaccinated as early as possible to give your body time to build immunity. Getting the flu vaccine now will also provide protection during the entire flu season.

Flu vaccines are available at pharmacies (including those in grocery stores), participating medical provider offices, Federally Qualified Health Centers (for their patients), as well as Division of Public Health clinics. DPH is also advising the public that the flu vaccine can be administered at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine. While DPH no longer holds mass community flu clinics, it will offer flu vaccines at community-based locations where staff are administering COVID-19 vaccines.

Flu symptoms come on suddenly, and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, chills and fatigue. Children, older adults, and those who have chronic underlying medical conditions are most at risk for complications from the flu and are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated now. Some signs and symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, including fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, chills and fatigue. Testing can effectively help you determine which illness you have.

Those sick with the flu should stay home from work, school and other gatherings and not return until they have been free of

fever – with temperature less than 100 degrees F (37.8 degrees C), without the use of fever-reducing medications – for at least 24 hours.

In addition, people with flu symptoms should avoid close contact with well people in the household and stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water and other clear liquids. Over-the-counter medicines can provide symptom relief, but if you suspect you have influenza, call your doctor as they may decide to provide antiviral medications to help hasten recovery and prevent serious complications. This is particularly important for those who feel very sick, are pregnant or have chronic medical conditions.

DPH will again be sharing flu-related messaging through radio, print, and social media messaging, and will distribute a toolkit to schools, community-based organizations and medical providers to help them encourage flu vaccination through their networks as well.

For more information about the flu and where to get vaccinated, [visit flu.delaware.gov](http://visit.flu.delaware.gov) or call 1-800-282-8672.

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Anyone who is deaf, hard of hearing, Deaf-Blind or speech disabled can contact DPH by dialing 711 first using specialized devices (i.e. TTY, TeleBraille, voice devices). The 711 service is free and to learn more about how it works, please visit delawarerelay.com.

The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or

more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.